

America, India, and Kashmir, 1945–49: “If Ignorance About India in This Country is Deep, Ignorance About the [Princely] States is Abysmal”¹

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ABSTRACT

This analysis offers an alternative examination of American interest in India in the mid-1940s and situates the early American attitude to Kashmir into that matrix. The two years from 1945 to 1947, those of the emergence of decolonisation and the Cold War, critically influenced America’s attitude first towards India and then towards Kashmir. It has been commonplace to describe America’s early understanding of the Kashmir conflict as an issue unconnected with the Cold War until 1952–1954. Even those works, which argue for an early presence of an “east-west lens” in the American consciousness, begin from either the Communist triumph in China or the outbreak of the Korean War. This analysis, instead, shows how soon, how much, and how comprehensively various sections of American government looked at Kashmir through an international prism.

It is conventional for writings on Indo–American relations during the 1940s to trace a curve of hope and disappointment. This discourse includes J.J. Singh and the India League of America, “anti-imperialist” President Franklin Roosevelt pressuring Prime Minister Winston Churchill about India in 1941, then sending Louis Johnson to India in 1942, America’s “Friends of India” led by Eleanor Roosevelt, and Jawaharlal Nehru’s sister’s, Vijayalakshmi Pandit’s public forays to great acclaim in the United States in 1944–1945.² Thereafter an assortment of differences exist around colonialism, commerce and the Cold War under President Harry Truman.³ However, as shown recently, there existed an ambiguity in Roosevelt’s approach towards India. Whilst he was personally “a staunch proponent of better relations with India” that caused some “shaky moments” between him and Churchill, winning the war was their “top order of business” and India was not “worth upsetting the Anglo–American alliance.”⁴ Similarly, despite a visible presence of “Friends of India” in America, a considerable debate occurred in Washington about India’s strategic importance to America in 1945–1947. Whilst the Treasury,

the intelligence establishment and the Defence Department advocated India's "value," the British Embassy in Washington noted with relief that for the State Department, India was "not an American 'interest' in the same sense as China or the Philippines" at this time.⁵ After 1947, with Washington pre-occupied with Europe and the Middle East, "Asia soon came to be understood as Truman's weak point."⁶

Secondly, whilst the years 1947 to 1949 in the Indo-American relations have been examined in great detail over the probability of a military alliance, assumption of Cold War rhetoric, evolution of Indian non-alignment, economic aid, possible treaty arrangements, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's October 1949 visit to America,⁷ Kashmir's place in this mapping has remained somewhat over-shadowed. It is necessary, therefore, to provide the early American position on Kashmir within this matrix. As the Truman Administration "got a taste of nationalist India" and its "independence of thought and action" in 1946–1947,⁸ it contributed to creating India's international identity against the evolving Kashmir dispute after January 1948. As the diplomacy around Kashmir took centre-stage, Truman, his secretary of state, George Marshall, and Marshall's successor, Dean Acheson, "grew increasingly irritated with the premature manifestations of the new India's policy of non-alignment."⁹

In August 1947, British rule in India ended with the partition of the sub-continent into the two dominions of India and Pakistan.¹⁰ At this time, two-fifths of the area of Indian subcontinent was under 560-odd Princely States over whom London and New Delhi exercised suzerainty. Indirectly ruled by the British, the large internally autonomous Princely India became bound by a treaty of paramountcy after the 1857 revolt against the East India Company.¹¹ Consequently, it was technically free to choose its future once paramountcy lapsed with independence and partition. However, in practical terms, few states could resist accession to either dominion and, by August 1947, except Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Jammu and Kashmir, all others had acceded—mostly to India and some to Pakistan.¹² Amongst these three, Kashmir's modern history had been that of "Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects."¹³ It was the largest princely state in the sub-continent in terms of area, and the most strategic in terms of location—surrounded by the-then Soviet Central Asian Republics, Sinkiang, Tibet, North-West Frontier Province [NWFP], Punjab, and Afghanistan.

Popular political activity in Kashmir Valley had started in 1932, when Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas and others founded the Muslim Conference. Renamed the National Conference in 1939, it subsequently adopted a progressive social programme of land and education reforms in a manifesto titled "*Naya* [New] Kashmir" produced by Abdullah's left-leaning associates and socialist friends.¹⁴ Close to Nehru, then a senior Congress Party leader, Abdullah launched a "Quit Kashmir" agitation against

the ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, in May 1946 that saw Abdullah and his associates get jailed. His agitation had coincided with the visit of the British Cabinet Mission to India to discuss the transfer of power, which noted “increasing communist activity” in Kashmir—a feeling re-enforced by the visit of the British Communist Rajni Palme Dutt in July 1946, as well as the drifting away of Abbas and his Muslim Conference from Abdullah’s National Conference.¹⁵

With the announcement by Prime Minister Clement Attlee on 20 February 1947 about Britain’s definite withdrawal from India no later than June 1948 and the subsequent arrival of Louis Mountbatten as the last Viceroy, the pace of the “endgames of empire” in India quickened.¹⁶ After announcing the partition plan on 3 June 1947, Mountbatten summoned the princes and their representatives and advised them to join either India or Pakistan keeping in mind their location, religious composition of their population, and transport, communication, and trade links. With respect to Kashmir, in mid-June, he paid a visit to Singh, who given Nehru’s links with his *bête noire*, Abdullah, dithered between choosing either the Muslim League’s Pakistan or the Congress India.¹⁷ By August 1947, with the Congress leader, Mahatma Gandhi, visiting Kashmir, pressure mounted on Singh to make up his mind. He removed his independence-minded premier, Ramachandra Kak, in mid-August, released his senior British officials from their duties in September, and freed Abdullah from prison in early October.¹⁸ However, two rebellions against his rule in Poonch and Gilgit, the southwestern and northwestern corners of the state adjoining Pakistan, had begun, and Singh sent troops to suppress them.¹⁹ Concurrently, post-partition violence engulfing the neighbouring divided Punjab was reaching Jammu, the southern part of the princely state.²⁰

In late-October 1947, this critical situation turned explosive by a tribal movement into Kashmir from the neighbouring NWFP.²¹ Singh shifted to Jammu and sought help from India. Mountbatten, now independent India’s governor-general, and Nehru, Indian prime minister, who had an ancestral and sentimental attachment to Kashmir, insisted on accession of the state in return for Indian military and diplomatic help. On 26–27 October 1947, in a still-debated sequence of events, Indian troops were airlifted to Kashmir, an instrument of accession signed, and a provisional administration with Abdullah at its head installed.²² Thereafter, Pakistan army’s entry into the conflict produced a full-fledged war between India and Pakistan.²³

Having faith in Abdullah’s popularity and desire to integrate with India, Nehru also promised a plebiscite in Kashmir under United Nations [UN] auspices.²⁴ However, New Delhi never risked testing Kashmiri political allegiance on the altar of their national self-determination and religious identity and, by 1949–1950, intelligence reports “disabused [New Delhi] of this mid- summer madness to believe we can win a plebiscite.”²⁵ For

independent India, like its British predecessor, Kashmir was of strategic value but, for Nehru, it also held importance ideologically as a secular exemplar *vis-à-vis* Islamic Pakistan. On the other hand, in a much-more fragile condition at this stage, Pakistan understood the Kashmir imbroglio as a matter of life-and-death.²⁶ In London, Attlee's government saw the unfolding affair with an unease: an "unfinished business of partition" that put them in the firing line of competing Indian and Pakistani claims and expectations that had now reached the UN Security Council, where India had lodged a complaint on 31 December 1947.²⁷ After the creation of a UN Commission on India and Pakistan [UNCIP] with American participation, the ambit of the dispute's significance widened in 1947–1949, coinciding with the emerging Cold War, towards which we turn now.²⁸

Between 1941 and 1944, Washington's criticism of British rule in India had appeared to London a consequence and not a cause of a traditional anti-British attitude.²⁹ American interest in Indian affairs seemed derived from India's "usefulness in shortening the war against Japan" and the desire of an "orderly transition" in Asia.³⁰ It lacked the "sentimental affection and admiration" that Americans had for China.³¹ If 1943 saw concern in American official and public circles, to British chagrin, about the combined effect of a famine in Bengal and Japanese propaganda, 1944 saw American forces stationed in India and a shift of focus to their battles in Burma.³² Interest in India had peaked in summer 1944 when Japan seemed likely to get a firm foothold in Assam, but as that threat ebbed so did American interest.³³ Vice President Henry Wallace declared in a speech in July that if it was not America's mission to underwrite continuing empires, then it was also not its mission to write declarations of independence for colonies.³⁴ William Phillips, Roosevelt's special ambassador to India, reminded the President that it was "in view of the military position," that India was their business.³⁵ By mid-1945, European re-construction, events in China, and Palestine—not to mention Russia—were edging India and its independence out of the American political and public space.³⁶ The British Embassy in Washington could confidently report, "India is not an American 'interest' [but] a theme for moral reprobation . . . India must choose an external policy. The days of secure isolated independence are over."³⁷

In the estimation of Frederick Puckle, the British advisor on Indian Affairs in the Embassy, the two key themes of this external policy, communism and Islam, came together for the first time in June 1945. Noting that Britain was "the greatest Muslim power in the world," Puckle asked Olaf Caroe, Foreign Secretary in New Delhi, to look out for any signs of Russian interest in India. He had been hearing tales in Washington about India's strategic importance to America.³⁸ In November, Secretary of State James Byrnes asked the British ambassador, Lord Halifax, whether Britain could keep two bases in India, outside Karachi and Calcutta.³⁹ In January 1946, Truman sent a special

envoy, Averill Harriman, to talk to the viceroy, Archibald Wavell, about the possibilities of defence agreements.⁴⁰ Deteriorating relations with Moscow and American entanglement in China had brought this greater realisation of the difficulties of decolonisation under the shadow of communism. Washington now acknowledged that “while the Western Powers have to get out, they cannot [be] careless of what they leave behind.”⁴¹ Simultaneously, America expanded its presence in India. By September 1946, an exchange of Ambassadors was readied, and there were twice as many American correspondents in New Delhi as British. The fact was not lost on Wavell who put it down to America’s “shrewd idea of the importance of India as a market.”⁴² Overcoming its misgivings, London accepted this American attention “in view of the Russophile tendencies” of Nehru and the common desire to avoid another China in India.⁴³

In November 1946, Truman sent an Air Mission to India and the Middle East. It found Nehru, vice-president of the Interim Government, “cooperative, cordial and friendly” towards a commercial air agreement but no more.⁴⁴ In December, the Americans tasted Interim India’s independent foreign policy at UN. As the Pandit-led delegation opposed treatment of Indians in South Africa, the Dutch in Indonesia, worked hard on the Trusteeship Council, and voted alongside Russians on many matters,⁴⁵ Washington urged London to hold on and not leave India to anarchy or, worse, Russia.⁴⁶ For the British, especially Wavell, the irony was bittersweet. In less than five years, Washington had come from criticism to co-operation on India.⁴⁷ In January 1947, the State Department asked its consul in India, George Merrell, to share its concerns about Russia with both Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Pakistani leader.⁴⁸ After the Attlee Government’s February announcement of its definite intention to leave India, some Americans had started to “add up Egypt, Burma, Palestine and India and arrive at a formidable total of responsibilities,” which now would have to be borne by somebody else.⁴⁹

In this fast-changing international situation, Nehru chose the lawyer-Congressman, Asaf Ali, to become India’s first ambassador in Washington. Ali was a strange choice. His socialist wife, Aruna, was bound to be at the very least a “bit of a nuisance” in America.⁵⁰ Ali’s job was to convince those who mattered in America that partition did not detract from the “solid core” that remained India.⁵¹ In his first meeting with Marshall on 26 February 1947, Ali had little to contribute as Marshall discussed China and emphasised unity in Asia against communism.⁵² Ali’s counterpart was an equal misfit for different reasons. Henry Grady left San Francisco in May 1947 as America’s first ambassador to an India that no longer existed when he reached New Delhi in June—the partition plan had been announced by then.⁵³ With a Catholic background and a lifetime in trade and commerce, Grady understood the Cold War as a moral and economic struggle. It was axiomatic for

him that “an American Ambassador always has a Russian problem on his hands.”⁵⁴ Grady was not a stranger to India, having been on the American technical mission sent in April 1942 to investigate the possibilities of producing war equipment; he therefore approached India primarily in terms of its “great natural resources” and came imbued by that old spirit “to stimulate the production of a friendly country by a powerful ally.”⁵⁵

However, this overt stress on economic issues combined with suspicions about the British and a lack of political currency with the State Department, especially Acheson,⁵⁶ produced misgivings in India about Grady. On the day of his appointment, Ali had complained to Under-Secretary Robert Lovett that Grady treated India as no more than “a source of material supply.”⁵⁷ In New Delhi, Mountbatten believed that “Grady had been sent here for one purpose only . . . to sell American industrialisation.”⁵⁸ Nehru considered him a good man but “rather 19th century in his economics.”⁵⁹ Unlike Jinnah, he did not attend the 4 July party given for Grady by Mountbatten.⁶⁰ Grady returned the compliment by calling Nehru “uninformed in world affairs” during the early days of Kashmir debates at the UN.⁶¹ Grady’s arrival also coincided with the first signs of Washington’s unease about the position of the Indian princely states.⁶² Initially, concerned about the tribal territory along the Afghan border,⁶³ it soon noticed Hyderabad, Kashmir, and their desire for independence and informed London that it had “no intention of according any Indian state, especially Hyderabad or Kashmir, diplomatic recognition.”⁶⁴

The State Department wasted no time on another question. One month before Pakistan’s birth, Loy Henderson, the influential head of the Near-Eastern Affairs Bureau, prepared a memorandum on America’s recognition. He stressed Pakistan’s status as the largest Muslim country in the world and its location as “one of the most strategic.”⁶⁵ This assessment assumed importance when Grady informed Truman that “nationalism in India” was taking “the form of criticising the Western Powers.”⁶⁶ In September 1947, wondering about India’s new international position and worried about Pakistan’s vulnerability in the light of its territorial proximity to Afghanistan and Russia,⁶⁷ Henderson shared with the British Embassy his expectations from Pakistan and contrasted it with his scepticism about India.⁶⁸ Ali was told that if the deteriorating communal situation in India was “not checked, chaos might follow . . . into which Russia would be drawn in.”⁶⁹ When, against this backdrop, crisis in Kashmir broke in late October 1947, the State Department’s first much-quoted reactions were that it would much prefer Kashmir’s settlement by direct Indo-Pakistani negotiations or by Britain and the Commonwealth. But the accompanying remarks on the international dimensions of the dispute, undimmed even in this first paper prepared by Henderson, have gone comparatively unnoticed: “but if a third power intervention occurs then the US position must be further studied.”⁷⁰ There were

only two candidates for such intervention—Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. Grady and Charles Lewis Jr., the *chargé d'affaires* in Karachi, noticing India's "hand to mouth" policy towards Pakistan, framed the Kashmir developments from the first in terms of the sub-continent's defence against them.⁷¹

On 3 January 1948, *The Economist* commented that "the Indian appeal to UNO is only too likely to involve Indian affairs in the whirlpool of current Great Power Rivalries."⁷² Yet historians have described America's early understanding of the Kashmir conflict as an issue unconnected with this whirlpool, and have contended that the Kashmir dispute remained outside the scope of the then prevailing international climate "until the beginning of 1952."⁷³ Recent literature has further shifted the first international milestone to America's 1954 security alliance with Pakistan, and this assertion, ironically, has gone hand-in-hand with an acknowledgement that "US-India confrontation over Kashmir took place against a background of rising foreign policy differences between [them]."⁷⁴ Even those works highlighting an early presence of an "east-west lens" in the American consciousness beginning with communist victory in China in October 1949 or the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 argue for an "integrated" American approach to South Asia until then.⁷⁵ In fact, as shown on the question of American aid to India on Kashmir too, American policy "neatly coincided with shifting tides in the history of the Soviet-American confrontation."⁷⁶

As early as December 1947, the State Department contextualised the conflict within the Soviets' "special interest because of Kashmir's proximity to their southern boundary" as well as the Chinese "historic interest in the area."⁷⁷ At the first Anglo-American meeting on Kashmir when the dispute reached the UN in January 1948, Philip Noel-Baker, leading Britain's delegation, wondered whether Russia "would be quiescent." Lovett replied that "Russia ... could adopt an obstructionist role," especially as "Mrs Pandit had worked rather closely with the Russians in previous UN meetings."⁷⁸ Moreover, perceptions existed of Afghanistan as a thin edge of the Soviet wedge.⁷⁹ To this was added Afghan-Pakistani tension over their imperial border—the Durand Line—strong enough for Afghanistan to vote against Pakistan's admission to the UN.⁸⁰

On 12 January 1948, the State Department's Office of Soviet and East European Analysis began the process by preparing an analysis of the "Probable Soviet Reaction in the Security Council to the Kashmir Controversy."⁸¹ This exegesis identified the Kashmir dispute as an "opportunity" for Russia in India, noting the "active cooperation" between the Indian and Soviet UN delegations in 1946–1947 and contrasting Moscow's lack of "cordial feelings towards Pakistan." In sub-continental matters, "on several counts Moscow [appeared] in support of Nehru and in direct opposition to Pakistan." Coming to Kashmir in particular, the memorandum

proved unambiguous: “On no single issue does Communist and Congress party policies coincide more closely than in support of . . . Sheikh Abdullah.” It anticipated Kashmir to be another lever in the basic Communist policy in India, “predicated on the assumption that Soviet-Communist cooperation with Nehru . . . can be encouraged with profit to the USSR. No such basis for Soviet cooperation with Pakistani leaders exists.” To the Bureau, it appeared that an expression of Soviet sympathy to India on Kashmir could achieve several of Moscow’s aims at once. It could “mollify in some measure India’s disappointment” over having lost to Ukraine for a seat on the Security Council in October 1947, “blacken the continuing role of British within the Government of Pakistan,” and further the cause of a left-leaning, autonomous Abdullah-led government in Kashmir.

With the recently appointed first ambassador, Paul Alling, the American Embassy in Karachi portrayed Kashmir after February 1948 as between Pakistan’s almost “contiguous border with the Soviet Union and proximity to the Persian Gulf” and Nehru’s neutralism.⁸² New Delhi knew that the “undefined Kashmir frontiers in Gilgit, Sinkiang and Tibet” handicapped India’s international position.⁸³ Through March and April, as the Security Council debated Kashmir, the State Department remained conscious of the repercussions in “other directions.”⁸⁴ Its increasing interest reflected Grady’s admission in New Delhi that whilst Washington’s previous position was “this ball is at the feet of UK,” it was now becoming dissatisfied.⁸⁵ Warren Austin, the American UN ambassador, shared this with Abdullah, and Canada’s high commissioner in India told Nehru that India’s case would receive “greater sympathy” if framed in strategic terms.⁸⁶ By May 1948, the American Army started to become “particularly interested in Pakistan” and Kashmir.⁸⁷ Major Francis Smith became military advisor to the UN Commission on Kashmir; alive to the breakup of colonial empires and its implications for American security, the intelligence community warned about Soviet exploitation of the former dependent areas.⁸⁸ Nothing highlights CIA interest in Kashmir at this time more than the little-known fact of the appointment in June of one of its officers, Calvin Hawley Oakes, as the political advisor to Ambassador Jerome Huddle, America’s representative on the UN Commission on Kashmir, considered desirable “in view of the presence of a Czech representative therein.”⁸⁹

Meanwhile, Grady’s Embassy was sending detailed notes on the “orientation of the Kashmir Government,” which were categorical that Abdullah was trying to develop Kashmir along Soviet lines. Arguing that Abdullah would like to be independent of India and Pakistan, the Embassy believed that his leadership benefitted from communist contacts. Noting pointedly that Kashmir’s national flag, red with white plough, was comparable to the Soviets’, the report concluded, “a free Kashmir would strongly tend to drift into the Soviet orbit.”⁹⁰ Although these issues represented an “unsatisfactory,

unfinished business” for Grady—he would soon leave India—the report fed directly into guidance prepared for Huddle.⁹¹ In a telling comment on “The Soviet Position,” Huddle learnt that it was “in the beginning more inclined to favour India. At present, friendliness toward both and commitments to neither”⁹²

Simultaneously, the American Embassy in Karachi was reporting about the “Pathanistan” movement for an independent state in the NWFP led by the “Red Shirts” organisation of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. It pointed to their pre-1947 association with the Congress, linking it to India’s offensive in Kashmir.⁹³ In September 1948, an American National Intelligence Estimate presented Kashmir as a “promising field for increased Soviet activity” and Abdullah as a man with “Soviet dealings . . . compatible with the communist line.”⁹⁴ Against this backdrop, Nehru made his maiden appearance at the UN in October 1948. The State Department readied for the Indian premier who, in Grady’s words, went “beyond neutrality.”⁹⁵ Briefed that Nehru “epitomised” India’s “immaturity and self-righteousness on Kashmir and other matters of international relations,”⁹⁶ Marshall told him that Kashmir was a “difficult local issue [complicating] the world situation.”⁹⁷ Relating his talk with Nehru to Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary, Marshall indicated that he would be surprised if “our talk did not add to [Nehru’s] appreciation of Russia.”⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the State Department began viewing Pakistan’s strategic character as an “opportunity.” It remained confident that despite Pakistan having established diplomatic relations with China and Russia, it remained “basically pro-USA.”⁹⁹ The British were less sanguine. Pakistan’s decision to exchange envoys with Russia in May 1948 had come as a shock to London as it had been representing Pakistan in Moscow; it pondered whether pique over Kashmir had prompted this decision.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, Marshall assured the Pakistani premier, Liaquat Ali Khan, that America had very much in mind the arc from Greece to Pakistan via Turkey and Iran, notwithstanding the hurdles of Palestine and Kashmir.¹⁰¹ On Palestine, Jinnah had been bitter about London “throwing up the sponge” in face of American pressure and, in his last *Eid* message, enjoined the “power politics in Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir.”¹⁰² Apart from Palestine, however, the attitude of Pakistan’s UN delegation had coincided more closely with America’s rather than India’s.¹⁰³

A key change of personnel darkened the situation. Against his wish and under an anti-Semitic cloud, Henderson succeeded Grady in New Delhi in November 1948.¹⁰⁴ An “old-line Foreign Service Officer” and “cold warrior,” Henderson was influential in the State Department where, as director of Near East and South Asia Affairs, he handled Palestine and Kashmir.¹⁰⁵ Viewing the New Delhi posting as a “mixed blessing,” he arrived in India as Cold War lines hardened.¹⁰⁶ On Kashmir especially, two key strains of Henderson’s

personality and long-held views—staunch anti-communism and pro-Arabism—came together. “Primed by experience to see the cynical and self-serving in international affairs,” Henderson came to India, “with nothing but the Soviet Union on his mind,” keen to influence Nehru, and resolve Kashmir.¹⁰⁷ His first impression of Nehru was “friendly and favourable,” if “reserved and non-committal.” In time, their relations deteriorated.¹⁰⁸ When arriving in India, Henderson felt that the Soviet Union was following policies critical of Nehru, who was making special efforts to improve them. Soon Henderson “would not think that India was following a really neutral position”; in turn, Nehru would be irritated with American policies regarding Kashmir.¹⁰⁹ With Henderson’s appointment to India following that of Frank Roberts, the British deputy high commissioner, some Indian officials wondered whether the posting of two Russian experts to the major Western missions in New Delhi had “any significance.”¹¹⁰

By December 1948, Huddle and the American UN delegation desired that Washington lead in the matter to “prevent Kashmir from deteriorating into another China.”¹¹¹ Almost a year before the Communist victory in China, the Near East Bureau was conscious that “decisions which we may make in that regard would doubtless [affect] the concentration and nature of our effort [on Kashmir].”¹¹² Elbert Mathews, chief of the South Asian Affairs Division, recalled the feeling of having a “political stake in the democratic experiment in India as contrasted with the Communist experiment in China.”¹¹³ Moreover, Marshall alluded to “difficulties” in China in discussing Kashmir with the British.¹¹⁴ Lovett even requested that James Forrestal, the defence secretary, select 15 to 20 American officers as UN observers for the ceasefire in Kashmir and pointed to its “intelligence value in view of recent events in China.”¹¹⁵

As 1948 ended, the State Department gathered its thoughts on this “bit of unfinished British business in South Asia.” It had noticed over the preceding ten months, a “pronounced tendency for the British to side rather heavily first with Pakistan, then with India and now with Pakistan depending on ... Commonwealth interests.”¹¹⁶ What then of the American perspective on the problem? When Truman was inaugurated as president in his own right in January 1949—with Acheson as his new secretary of state—the State Department was torn. On one side was the recognition of the defence problem of a volatile, vulnerable, and strategically significant area;¹¹⁷ on the other stood the realisation that America was constantly being pressed from all directions to take leading roles in various disputes—Palestine, Indonesia, and Kashmir—at a time when Congress, the press, and the public preferred to limit American commitments.¹¹⁸ Acheson saw himself as a “19th century man” and was “appalled” by India.¹¹⁹ His response to Kashmir would combine this deference to the British with scorn for the Indians.¹²⁰

Few events deepened the connexion between Kashmir and communism in London and Washington than the delayed impact of the February 1948

communist take-over in Czechoslovakia on the UN Commission for Kashmir. This entailed the substitution of the pro-West Czech representative, Josef Korbel, by Ing Oldrich Chyle in February 1949. Chyle has remained a virtual unknown. Americans saw him as a “faithful servant of Moscow” who was also in “close communication with Sheikh Abdullah.”¹²¹ Korbel did more than most to contextualise Kashmir within the East-West confrontation and, requesting asylum in America, claimed that his refusal to follow Soviet policy in the UN Commission led to his removal.¹²² Five years later, he wrote in ringing terms:

No one realises the international implications of the Kashmir conflict better than the Communists. To [them], a divided Kashmir is another divided Korea, another divided Indo-China, another divided Germany, another divided Austria ...¹²³

Simultaneously, reports about Abdullah’s “pro-Communist” aims, associates, and associations started to pour into London and Washington.¹²⁴ Having returned “uneasy” from Kashmir, Henderson reckoned that communist influence in Kashmir was “greater than the Indian Government cares to admit.”¹²⁵ Bevin’s Foreign Office noticed, too, a contrast between Nehru’s firmness in dealing with communists elsewhere compared to Kashmir.¹²⁶ The British high commissioners, Archibald Nye in India and Laurence Grafftey-Smith in Pakistan, had been warning about Abdullah’s strong left-leanings for some time,¹²⁷ and London speculated whether the Commonwealth link meant anything at all if it could not even talk to the Indians frankly about Kashmir.¹²⁸ Washington responded with doubts about India’s legal position in Kashmir, Pakistan’s defence limitations, and distress at Russia’s plans.¹²⁹ By December 1949, memoranda were being prepared there on “similarities” between Chyle on Kashmir and the Soviets on Indonesia “so as to anticipate the Soviet position on Kashmir.”¹³⁰ In March 1949, Admiral Chester Nimitz, the former American chief of naval operations who compared Nehru on Kashmir to Hitler on the Sudetenland, became the plebiscite administrator for Kashmir.¹³¹ The State Department gave him a note on the “relationship of Kashmir question to US interests in South Asia,” calling Kashmir a “dual UK-US responsibility” at the nexus of communism and Islam.¹³²

Sympathising with the British caught between an intransigent India and an insecure Pakistan, Acheson sought to lend a helping hand. Aware that London was keen to pressure India on Kashmir by linking it with their desire for a seat on the Security Council, Acheson told Pandit obliquely that he hoped Kashmir would not affect India’s leadership in the wider Arab-Asian world against communism; Indian intransigence over Kashmir made it difficult to support the Indian candidature.¹³³ This served to strengthen Pandit’s feeling that “Kashmir is the price we are asked to pay for a seat in the SC.”¹³⁴ By mid-1949, Acheson considered Kashmir a

“handicap” at the UN because any debate “would provide opportunity to Soviets.”¹³⁵ Bevin added that internally, there were “signs of USSR involvement.”¹³⁶ The American Embassy at Moscow also sent its appreciation. Writing on the second anniversary of India’s independence, Ambassador Alan Kirk had no doubt that the Kremlin followed Kashmir “with interest,” was pleased that the impasse obstructed “a natural working out of forces,” and demonstrated “UN fallacy.”¹³⁷

Opportunity for a “frank exchange” with Nehru came with his October trip to America. First efforts to pave the way fell to Henderson, who believed that London looked upon the Anglo–Indo–American relationship as a zero-sum game.¹³⁸ He advised that Kashmir could have two frames: in sub-continental terms with the British in the lead or internationally with America at the forefront.¹³⁹ He had an unsatisfactory interview with Bevin enroute to take up his post and was never at ease with Nye in India. Amongst the Indians, he got on well with Girja Shankar Bajpai, the External Affairs ministry secretary-general. Pressing on Bajpai the shadow of “external aggression,” Henderson pointed out that if Washington appeared more inclined to accept Pakistan’s views on Kashmir, it was because India appeared “uncooperative in various aspects of US–Soviet relations.”¹⁴⁰ He hoped Nehru’s visit would alter that perception.¹⁴¹ Ominously, Bajpai reminded him that Nehru “did not believe in appearing as an apologist.”¹⁴² Secondly, Henderson made clear that Washington believed that strategic considerations in Kashmir put aside the legal aspects of the Indian position.¹⁴³ Bajpai replied that State Department thinking was “wrong” as India “did not see how anyone could threaten the subcontinent across the snowy wastes that lie to the north.”¹⁴⁴

In the meantime, on 12 May 1949, Pandit had presented her credentials as India’s ambassador to Truman. Henderson and the Near East Bureau had urged Acheson to make every effort “to give Madame Pandit a cordial welcome to impress upon her some of the differences between US and Soviet Union.”¹⁴⁵ Both knew that Pandit, an admirer of the Soviet experiment, had been repelled by her ambassadorship to Moscow, her disillusionment had a “deep effect” on Nehru’s pro-Soviet tendencies and “a successful mission for her in the US” would augment this process.¹⁴⁶ As a good omen, on the same day, the announcement of Nehru’s October visit to America was made. Louis Johnson, the Defence secretary and friend of Nehru since “ordered” by Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull to “cultivate” him in 1942, had warmly recommended the visit to Truman, “particularly in light of the China situation.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, received exceptionally well, Pandit began her tenure feeling “overwhelmed.”¹⁴⁸ She assumed her post in the immediate aftermath of India’s decision to remain in the Commonwealth and reported “mixed reactions” to Nehru. The State Department had welcomed it, but the Treasury secretary, John Snyder, told her that he hoped India “did not intend to cripple” itself permanently by such an alliance.¹⁴⁹

In multiple replies, Nehru made clear that whilst mindful of the economic help India could get from America, aware that the State Department needed to be cultivated,¹⁵⁰ and conscious of India's acute economic crisis,¹⁵¹ he desired financial help but did not wish entanglements with American business interests. It was an axiom for him that American thought mixed "good intentions, private profit and national policy."¹⁵² He also belatedly realised that under Ali and his temporary successor B.N. Rau, Indian diplomacy in Washington had been rather ineffective and hoped that Pandit's popular presence would be "the best propaganda" for India.¹⁵³ Bajpai, an old Washington hand, cautioned Pandit that "people are apt to forget the very real difference between public relations and publicity."¹⁵⁴ Pandit's first task involved planning Nehru's engagements in concert with the State Department; but she charted such a public course for her brother that Bajpai cautioned that Nehru would "achieve much more by personal contacts and by speaking to selected groups than by addressing immense audiences."¹⁵⁵

The spectres of China and Kashmir loomed large over the trip. Nehru told Pandit that he could not ignore the facts on the ground in China for all his friendship for the nationalist Kuomintang leader, Chiang Kai-shek.¹⁵⁶ India was in no hurry to recognise Communist China but it was "just not going to stand up as crusaders against it." He was worried about Indian condemnation if it supported the "bankrupt, stiff-necked Kuomintang" and "it would give fillip to Communism in India."¹⁵⁷ Equally, on Kashmir, he would not weaken by unfavourable American meddling, expressing this point to Henderson rather forcibly.¹⁵⁸ By August 1949, Nehru's tour programme had become a "tug of war" between Pandit, supported by Johnson, and the State Department. Pandit complained to her brother: "The State Department wishes to present you as a prima donna The people of America are hungry to meet Nehru, the fighter for Indian independence, the writer, the world citizen [and] the man who is creating the new India. They are not interested in the PM as such."¹⁵⁹

The State Department did not share these feelings. And whether or not the American public waited breathlessly for Nehru and the State Department felt "nervous" about it,¹⁶⁰ Henderson suggested to Nehru that it was necessary that Bajpai accompany him. The Americans rightly believed that Bajpai strove for closer Indo-American relations.¹⁶¹ Nehru agreed and mildly rebuked his sister that he disliked "this business of speaking a lot . . . about our high ideals. Our immediate past and present is not in consonance with these."¹⁶² As the time of his trip neared, Nehru resolved "to be friendly with the Americans but always making it clear what we stand for. I want to make no commitments which come in the way of our basic policy."¹⁶³ To his friend Mountbatten, he wrote that he was clear that he would not "entangle" himself in "any detailed talks."¹⁶⁴ In the event, this reluctance was amply

displayed. A visit that took place against a backdrop of the successful detonation of the first Soviet atomic device and the triumph of the Chinese Communists saw wide-ranging talks, especially with Acheson. Rather symbolically, when they turned to Kashmir, Acheson “either due to the lateness of the hour or the complexity of the subject” became confused.¹⁶⁵ Much has been written about Nehru’s first, anti-climactic trip to America; for this analysis, it suffices to note that wanting “to learn, to be receptive [and] to see their good points,” Nehru left without abandoning his critical views of America. To do so would require “to be swept away by them and of that there was not much chance.”¹⁶⁶

Whilst Nehru was still in the United States, Under-Secretary Dean Rusk noted that “time had now come when the Commonwealth nations should recognise their responsibility to settle Kashmir.”¹⁶⁷ This proposal was partly to jolt London, quietly pleased with Nehru’s trip because even though America and India had talked past each other on communism and colonialism, the Soviet press had declared Nehru the “new, obedient agent” of Washington, developments that could only bind India to the Commonwealth.¹⁶⁸ It also reflected the way in which the wind was blowing in the State Department, especially on the UN desk and in the South Asia Bureau.¹⁶⁹ Unable to get through to Nehru, it was disappointed at the general Indian attitude: “We are a big country, leave us alone; when we want your help, we will come for it.”¹⁷⁰ In New Delhi, Henderson rued Nehru’s lack of “practical realism,” his “woolly, evasive and frankly bad” impression, and his “vague, incoherent, general” defence on Kashmir.¹⁷¹ In London, the British analysed the trip as “more of a tribute to Nehru the individual than to the Prime Minister of India.”¹⁷² The Commonwealth Relations Office [CRO], “not consulted” about Nehru’s visit,¹⁷³ had been initially unhappy about it, more so when it learnt that Huddle had told the Pakistan ambassador in Burma that Nehru went “on the advice of the HMG.”¹⁷⁴ Annoyed at the State Department, CRO had attributed the trip to a growing realisation of India’s key role in Southeast Asia. It needed assurance by the State Department that “no special political significance should be attached to this goodwill tour.”¹⁷⁵ It summed up the trip thus:

The main value of the tour may well be that Nehru has learned the strength of public opinion in US in favour of a strong policy against Russia and America in turn has learnt that India’s support cannot be bought as a ready-made replacement of China in the Cold War against Communism.¹⁷⁶

George McGhee, assistant secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, visited India soon after and told Nye of the “very definite limit” of American interest in India.¹⁷⁷ He returned empty-handed on Kashmir, left the Indians without aid, and was convinced that America could never forge a firm relationship with India whilst Nehru was in charge.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, since

Liaquat's acceptance in July 1949 of an invitation to visit Moscow, London had emphasised the implications of this "unfortunate development."¹⁷⁹ McGhee now assessed Pakistan's increasing interest in the Pakistani–Soviet "cooperative attitude" on Kashmir.¹⁸⁰ Inviting Liaquat to Washington could create a favourable impression throughout the Muslim world as well as send a positive signal to Pakistan where America had been without an ambassador for more than a year.¹⁸¹ Truman approved and, in London, Wavell spoke for many Britons when he wrote to a friend, "I am very glad that Liaquat Ali Khan is going to America ... India has had too much of the limelight since partition."¹⁸² Liaquat cancelled his Moscow visit and travelled to America in May 1950. Thus, for Washington, Pakistani–Soviet relations provided insight to judge Moscow's interest over Kashmir.¹⁸³ These issues came together in a December 1949 CIA assessment. In a note to Truman on "observations of Nehru on US, UK and the Soviet Union," Director Roscoe Hillenkoetter wrote:

India cannot forget that in Kashmir it has a common frontier with the USSR. It desires to maintain good relations with Moscow ... Liaquat for some time had solicited an invitation to go to Moscow as a means of pressure on Washington and London. Now [we] have explicitly told Pakistan that [we] do not desire this visit to take place and he has had to renounce it. This cannot be to the advantage of Pakistan before Moscow.¹⁸⁴

Kashmir thus was a presence in Washington's international calculus from the outset of the Indo–Pakistani conflict belying the widespread view that until 1952–54, Kashmir remained on the "periphery" of the international climate. From 1947, different sections of the American "official mind" saw events in Kashmir through an international lens. Their post-1945 hopes from India and fears for Pakistan meant that their "limits of influence" did not mean a lack of interest. India's emerging international identity in 1945–1947 provided the first context in which the Kashmir dispute evolved. This application of larger calculations to a local crisis was not unique to Kashmir. After the Second World War, similar attitudes existed towards Greece, Palestine, Indonesia, and Korea; but in Kashmir for the first time, the difficulties of decolonisation directly confronted the calculations of the Cold War.

These two issues provided the initial American understanding of the Kashmir dispute in 1947–1949. American determination to confront the Cold War, doubts with respect to India at the UN, and disappointment at Nehru's personality and policies shaped this appreciation. Historians have often treated Kashmir as a manifestation of the unfinished past, the main impediments to squaring the circle the profoundly different geopolitical aspirations and underlying differences in political culture between India and Pakistan. But in 1947–1949, both India and Pakistan shared a poor

bargaining position and, initially led by the British, the Americans had much to offer. The situation also required a good deal from New Delhi and Karachi, which saw the transition of Kashmir in Washington's larger calculations.

Six decades later, the Kashmir dispute and analyses of it show no sign of “withering.”¹⁸⁵ With its origins embedded in British decolonisation in South Asia, the early Cold War priorities of the United States and Britain contextualised its evolution and international dimensions in 1948–1949. That it is still alive—through the fluctuating international fortunes of India and Pakistan, the end of the Cold War, and the religiously charged geo-political environment since 2001¹⁸⁶—testifies to the fact that viewing a regional conflict in a global perspective is “not merely the conceit of a historian.”¹⁸⁷ Understanding it fully comes only from situating it in a wider global context. Without this international context, Kashmir would likely have appeared as nothing other than an “unfinished business of partition.” Emerging in the twilight between the colonial and post-colonial worlds and the transition to Cold War calculations, this dispute continues today—in a very different world—showing tensions between legal principles and political permutations, competing claims of culture and religion, limits of international interventions, changing international political contexts, and geographical continuities amidst historical change.

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